7: Thompson--375-376 J-4 (no date) 1937 Laotians
116, 147, 461, 464, 621

"Labour, as is the case in so many tropical countries of great potential wealth, is the second greatest need. The Laotians' inadequacy, both numerically and psychologically, combined with the country's inaccessibility are almost insuperable obstacles to industrial or commercial progress. This was plainly seen when Laos's vast mineral wealth, especially in tin, attracted capitalist investment in the discreditable wave of mining speculation that spread over Indo-China in the late [376] 1920's. The Laotians have no sense of time, and a thousand obstacles and superstitions interfere with the accomplishment of work at a fixed date. Their physical stamina is not proof against epidemics, especially those maladies brought from foreign countries. Whole villages displace themselves at the slightest provocation. One Laotian proverb says: 'At the end of three days change your house; at the end of three years change your village.' What started as a necessity to escape invaders or soil exhaustion has become a habit, and a means of escaping any regular irksome task. The ease with which the Laotians drift across the Mekong into Siamese territory makes the French authorities very loath to take strict measures with them. Moreover, the European residents themselves, who would normally be the motive force behind any change, succumb to the prevailing atmosphere of su-su, the Oriental equivalent of dolce far niente."

10: d'Orleans--307 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 461, 463, 511, 556

[LSS: at Luang Prabang] "The men do but little work, labour in the mines and the cultivation of the soil being left to the Kas and it is only in the towns that they are found engaging in any artistic occupation, such as the making of jewellery or the chasing of silver. Even those who do work rarely do so for more than seven hours a day, and the woman keep the pot boiling by spinning silk and making various materials, though they do not overwork themselves. When a household is very hard pressed the men seek employment as boatmen, and are very expert, making enough in a month or two to keep them the rest of the year, so that if there are few large fortunes, most of the inhabitants have enough to live upon in comfort, preferring freedom and tranquillity to an excess of labour, which would only give them what they do not want. Moreover, when they do happen to have put by a decent sum of money, they go and spend it at the pagoda, either in fulfilment of a vow or in payment of some religious ceremony. This is their only luxury, nor, indeed, do they regard it as one, for they reckon upon profiting by it in another world."

23: Franck--329-330 T-2 (1924) 1926 Laotians
116, 461

"I thought several times that afternoon that the men were going to give up entirely. They lay down in the road as if completely exhausted, something I had never seen a Chinese carrier do in all my two years of wandering in China; but finally we coaxed them at dark into a scattered little thatched town in the jungle on the edge of the clear rushing river that had made off with my canteen. The place was named Ban-long, with a waterfall to lull me to sleep in the basket-weave sala where I soon stretched out on my cot, for we had to start very early again. There was difficulty in getting men in time, and without the prince I should not have been able to get them at all. But he, working most of the night through the obsequious village head-man, collected twelve substitutes for our eight lazy Pwun or Nuong carriers, and [330] we were off in the soft, black tropical night between two and three in the morning."

23: Franck--344-345 T-2 (1924) 1926 Laotians
116, 461, 609

"On the other hand these naive jungle-dwellers do not lack physical fear. They crouched at the trail-side raising palmed hands to me; in the more settled districts farther south long rows of them crowded against the wall of the mountain road, even turning their faces away, as if fearing a blow, which seemed to speak badly for their rulers, whether the old ones or the present French--or were they merely dazzled by my magnificence? When our pace grew too slow to be borne, I could always drive the coolies on by galloping after them shouting, whereupon they actually ran. But soon they settled down to an almost lazy stroll again, covering hardly half the ground of the incessant dog-trot of the indefatigable Chinese; nor were there by any means as many smiles and [345] childish pleasantries as among those far harder workers and sufferers of many times greater hardships."

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

slaughterers are obliged to work by flares, which is responsible, the French think, for an unusually picturesque effect. It is 'not done' to go along while the actual killing is in progress, but shortly after, when the carcasses are suspended from hooks to be cut up, and the workers, stripped to their loincloths, and garishly splashed, paddle about in a vermilion sea. Cars are stationed just beyond the reach of the steaming odours, and one is recommended to see the thing as one views a nude in a picture gallery – that is, divorced from all but a disinterested abstraction, in this case the colour.

The possibilities of Vientiane, it was clear, would be quickly exhausted. Thao Nhouy, the Laotian Minister of Education, lent me his jeep to see some of the surrounding villages, but the roads were so appalling that it broke down after being driven for about five miles. He then suggested that I might like to see the local schoolgirls dancing, and when I said that I would be delighted, and asked for permission to take photographs, the girls were sent off home, on their bicycles, to get their best clothes. An hour or two later they began to trickle back, wearing their mothers' jewellery as well as their own and with their silk finery done up in paper parcels. When they had dressed and were ready they made a glittering sight. One girl wore a scarf ornamented with real gold thread said to be worth about £50 in English money. They danced under the supervision of a teacher whom I recognized as a professional actor, from the *boun*,[1] and who occasionally intervened when a girl failed in some minor feat, such as bending her fingers back at an expressive ninety degrees from the palm.

All these girls, dressed as they were like princesses, came from shacks in the forest. Each one had a bicycle – infallibly fitted with dynamo lighting, and sometimes 3-speed gears. It seems that a bicycle for his daughter is one of the essentials for which a Laotian will work. It is considered ill-bred and irreligious in Laos to work more than is necessary. The father of a family cultivates an amount of land, estimated, by a bonze who is expert in such matters, to be

[1] [i.e., Laotian religious festival. --Analyst]

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69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

sufficient for his requirements. If there are six members of the family, six standard, equal sized portions of land will be cultivated. If a child is born into the family another piece of land is cleared and worked. When a member of the family dies, whether it be a baby or the grandfather, cultivation of his portion will be stopped. Just enough is produced for the family to eat and to provide a small surplus sold in the market — *with the bonze's approval* — to buy occasional strict necessities, like a silk shawl and a bicycle for the daughter. There is no social insurance and there are no poor. The old and the sick are supported by the young, or, where they are left without able-bodied providers, by the community, and the bonzes give instructions for the necessary land to be placed under cultivation for them. The accumulation of wealth which is not to be used for definite, approved purposes, causes a man to lose prestige among his neighbours, just, as in the West, the process is reversed. The main difference, it seems, between Buddhism in Indo-China, and Christianity — apart from any question as to their relative merits — is that, whether we admire it or not, the former is largely put into practice.

It is a stimulating reflection that the Western millionaire, obsessed for the sake of social distinction with the amassing of enormous possessions — little of which he can personally consume — would attain the same ends of personal celebrity under a Laotian Buddhistic order of things by his priestly austerities — by embracing the most abject and prestige-conferring form of poverty.

For this reason perhaps the local Evangelist missionary and his wife have made no converts. Like all who have lived among the Laotians they are charmed with them — although, of course, disappointed at their blindness. They also deplore their immorality.

In the matter of converts the Evangelists have been no more unsuccessful than their Portuguese, Spanish and French forerunners. The Laotians having little capacity for abstractions, either in their

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who work gold mines--and by the inhabitants of several regions, whose state of fortune would nevertheless enable them to use a more precious metal.

Jewelry and examples of the goldsmith's art are found in different forms and types which vary greatly with the region and race, as will be seen by the nomenclature given in Chapter IX.

262

Food. The Laotian scorns the pleasures of the table, and is generally a moderate eater and drinker. Steam-cooked glutinous rice forms the basis of his food supply. To this he adds salt, peppers, various other spices, fresh or preserved fish, etc. Besides these, but less frequently, his day-to-day diet may be varied with poultry, eggs, buffalo meat, beef and pork, as well as venison. To be sure, it is mainly on the occasion of public or private festivals, which are fairly numerous in the course of the year, that the Laotian improves on his usual rather frugal fare in this way.

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The customary beverage is water which may be taken directly from the rivers or first be hastily decanted into jars or water-coolers of porous earthenware. In general, Laotians prefer water taken directly from the river to that which has been filtered. Finally, the people of Laos consume rice brandy which is obtained by distillation, and a kind of beer made by cold fermentation of rice mixed with paddy husks.

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The use of these drinks, aside from rare exceptions, is reserved for holidays.

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Physical appearance, character, occupations. The Laotian's character is, in general, mild, friendly and happy. His physiognomy is [181] open and smiling. Not quarrelsome by nature, he even shrinks from coming to blows in extreme cases and prefers to end a dispute with an outburst of laughter rather than with blows.

Since, all in all, it has few needs and inhabits a land with luxuriant vegetation which is abundantly favored with products to be had for the scavenging, this happy people can easily satisfy its needs and be content with its fate. [Illustration alongside text here.]

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It is assuredly lazy, but out of indifference much rather than out of any deliberate intent. It cannot grasp the advantage or utility of a regular and prolonged effort beyond what is strictly necessary to provide it with a living and a few distractions to which, in reality, its own joyous disposition makes the greatest contribution.

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To the men are reserved the chief tasks, which have a more virile and noble character than those which are the women's lot.

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Since there is not, so to speak, any class of salaried workers in Laos except in certain types of work and in transport by pirogues and rafts, the inhabitants of any given center lend one another their help in farming, harvesting, building houses or pirogues, etc. Taking turns, the one who has asked help of his neighbors will put on a celebration for them when the work is over, and will himself receive an invitation from someone else in return for help which he has given.

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Laotian celebrations, in which the bonzes are never forgotten, are usually given under the verandas of the pagodas or in their dependencies, unless they take place in the host's own home or under sheds specially constructed for the purpose on one side. The latter is always the case in a "Ngan" given for those who have helped in building a house, and the same is true for a birth or marriage.

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Celebrations generally begin towards four or five in the afternoon when the heat is beginning to wane. They last all night and sometimes resume on the following day after the guests have relaxed for a few hours. Some "Ngans" go on in this way for nearly a week and are interrupted only by the coming of the Laotian sabbath, a day of absolute rest when only the preparation of food is permitted, and no work or pleasure. By the light of kerosene lamps borrowed here and there, or of resinous torches, the girls, who are decked out in all their finery, are stationed in a line squatting down against a wall or partition. Before them there are [221] vases made of copper, silver or porcelain. They all pretend to be busy with minor tasks and may imitate, for example, the preparation of food. But in reality this is only their way of keeping some kind of countenance.

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The adults and children of both sexes are massed at each end of the row of girls. Then the young men, their heads covered with scarves, come and squat down opposite the girls and with their heads still covered begin an animated conversation which soon turns into regular flirting. If there is enough space the orchestra takes up its position nearby and in the center, between the young people, are the singers, improvisers and "Kene" players. Cakes, fruit, quids of betel, cigarettes, rice brandy and various condiments are passed around.

Spectators who have not been specially invited come and stand behind the young people, as do passersby who drop in for a quid, a cigarette, a cup of brandy or a bowl of rice, or to listen to the songs and music for a little while.

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they bear come, as in the case of the Khao-Thais, from peculiarities
[291] of costume. In fact, whereas the Dam-Thais, both men and women,
only wear clothing which is dark blue and almost black, with no
563 colored ornamentation, the Deng-Thais, although they wear the
same kind of clothing, always add a few ornaments such as embroidery,
galloons or red turbans.

142 Physical appearance. Costume. The Thais have strongly marked
features and stern faces. Their complexion is clear and rather swarthy,
461 and they are quite tall. They are more hardy and above all more
industrious than the Laotians.

Like the Annamites, the men let their hair grow. They bind it
302 up in a coil on the top of the head and cover it with a vast turban,
291 the ends of which fall onto their shoulders on either side of the face.
Men's clothing consists of a broad pair of trousers with a very low
seat and a straight tunic buttoned along the side which comes down
to the knees. A sort of sash made of the same kind of cloth hugs the
[286] waist over the tunic, as a belt would do. The material used by the
Thais for clothing are made of cotton which is generally grown locally
and which the [232] women spin, weave and dye themselves. Their
garments, made with very coarse, irregular thread, have a rough ap-
pearance but are very solid.

The women's figures are thick-set but not fleshy. Their faces,
142 which are more rounded than elongated, are pleasant and their eyes
are beautiful. But childbearing and the work of the fields soon destroy
their gracefulness, and after the age of twenty-five their figures thicken,
their wrists and ankles become heavy and their faces begin to harden
and wrinkle. [Illustration alongside text here]

[286] The Thai woman wears a skirt which is quite similar to the Laotian
skirt, but made of coarser cloth and dyed the same color as the men's
291 clothing. Over this she wears a very short jacket made of the same
cloth which is buttoned down the front and sometimes embellished
563 with chased silver work. The height of elegance is for the jacket to
be cut in such a way that when the woman moves in a certain way it
lets a little skin be seen above the skirt waist. Outside the home and for
ceremonies the women put on a sort of dressing gown which covers their
other clothing and comes down to the ankle. Its sleeves are very close-
fitting, and the garment buttons straight down the front to a point below
the waist. A strip of dark violet cloth, for the Dam-Thais, and red for

Tribal Tai

291 the Deng-Thais, is applied to the edges of the gown. It is further
563 ornamented [233] on the outside edge opposite the buttonholes with colored silk embroidery which does not go down below the waist.

This garment is also folded in half lengthwise and worn rolled around the body with the sleeves left hanging.

302 The women wear their hair parted down the middle in front and rolled into a sort of long tassel behind which is contained within
301 the folds of a little turban. The latter is wound above the forehead and the free end inserted under the first turn, on the nape of the neck. This headdress is quite similar to that of the Annamite women in Tonkin.

In certain regions of Laos, Thai women wind their hair into a sort of coil which girls wear loosely down their neck and betrothed or married women wear on top of the head. Thai jewelry is made of heavy silver and is of the same type as Laotian jewelry. The men wear bracelets on their wrists.

262 Food. The Thai diet is like that of the Laotians, but they prefer non-glutinous white rice and use chopsticks like the Chinese and
264 Annamites.

The use of betel is quite widespread among the Thais, but in
276 contrast to the Laotians they keep their teeth white. The Thais smoke the oily, opiated tobacco of Tonkin and China in bamboo waterpipes whose tiny bowls only contain a small pinch of tobacco. They also smoke a local variety of tobacco, either in cigarettes or in pipes with a highly worked clay bowl into which a long stem ending in a glass or jade mouthpiece is inserted.

156 Character. Although serious and reflective, the Thais have a vivacious and friendly character. They are somewhat cold in appearance, but are sound friends and highly affable when one gets to know them better.

[701] Gentler and more timid than the Laotians, they have no taste for the art of war and it is difficult to get them to stay in the native militia.

433 They are very self-seeking and much more miserly than the Lao-
438 tians. [234] It should be noted, moreover, that since they produce everything themselves and are a people of farmers and livestock
156 breeders, they do not have, by virtue of their ever sedentary occupations, the opportunities which these latter have to enjoy fairly high profits resulting from commercial transactions, nor the special habits which contact with different races gives.

181 The Thais love pleasure and celebrations. Guaranteed their daily
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Tribal Tai

181 bread by their work, they have scarcely a care for the morrow.
461 Scrupulous observers of the traditions handed down to them by their ancestors, they live an utterly carefree life and instinctively dread everything foreign or unknown to them.

463 Occupations. The men busy themselves with the tasks of farming,
241 fishing and hunting. They are very industrious and skilled farmers,
462 and can draw admirably on the soil's resources. They bring in the water needed for irrigating their rais or mountain ricefields through ingenious canals built along the sides of hills, and they also know how to capture springs, often very distant ones, for the same purpose. To decorticate paddy, they use mills driven by artificial waterfalls. The women perform the household chores, take care of the children, make and mend clothes, harvest and spin cotton, breed silkworms, unwind the cocoons and mill the silk. Theirs also is the task of supplying the home with water and with wood which they gather in the forest, as well as sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, getting in and decorticating the rice. These many tasks leave Thai women and girls little leisure, and it would thus seem only natural that they should profit by a moment of pleasure, whenever one presents itself in the midst of their multiple duties. They do, in fact, go in for fun eagerly and behave as keenly, despite their more reserved appearance, as their Laotian sisters.

361 Houses. There is no difference between Laotian villages and Thai villages, except that the latter are better kept and cleaner.

342 Thai houses are generally longer and higher than those of the
592 Laotians, by reason of the custom which decrees that the whole family--parents, children and grandchildren--shall live under the same roof. Some Thai houses are as much as thirty meters long and from eight to ten meters wide. In rare cases one finds much larger houses which are from seventy to seventy-five meters long and twenty-five meters wide.

342 Thai houses very often have no verandas on their long sides, but always have two, one at each end, which are covered by rounded roofs and serve as reception terraces or antichambers.

554 The houses of mandarins and notables can be distinguished from the others by the fact that the roof rafters and the trusses of the gables extend above the line of the roof and cross. These members are decorated with wooden silhouettes or scallops ending in discs which, depending on their number and arrangement, indicate the rank of the house's owner.

Tribal Tai

619 The Neua-Thais. The Neua-Thais differ very little, in all
361 respects, from their fellows. They generally live on higher ground than the other Thais, but they change the location of their village quite frequently. [241] [Illustration] [242] [Blank page] [243]

291 The women knot their skirts under their armpits, above their breasts, and always wear a very short jacket made of cotton, silk or velvet, depending on the season.

231 They engage in sericulture, and with the silk spin and weave brocaded cloth with harmonious colors.

779 At the same time as ancestor worship, the Neu-Thais practice an attenuated form of Buddhism. Pagodas are rare and the bonzes, few in number, serve several centers in turn.

• 461 Their character is docile. They do not have a very marked taste
276 for trade and are content to be excellent farmers and livestock breeders. Unfortunately, they are inclined to be opium smokers. This is doubtless due to the proximity of the Meos and Yaos who are the producers of the drug.

619 The Phou-Eunes. This branch of the Thai family is very close to
101 the Laotians in mores and customs.

There are only a few modifications in costume and language, modifications due to the age-old proximity of the Annamites and the continuous relations which have existed between the two peoples.

[438] These latter may be explained by the fact that the territory long inhabited by the Phou-Eunes in the east and southeast of Tran-Ninh is situated on the Tonkin Gulf side, and that their produce naturally flows towards the ports on the Annamite coast (1).

(1) To be sure, there are several groupings of Phou-Eunes in the Mekong basin, in Tran-Ninh, to the northeast of Vien-Tiane and in Camkeut-Cammon.

361 The Phou-Eunes prefer to live in high valleys and on high plateaus where the climate is quite severe during the winter. They are more reserved in character than the Laotians, more industrious and less inclined to celebrations and festivities of all kinds.

779 Their religion is Buddhism, but the bonzes are less numerous than elsewhere. It is probable that the little taste which Phou-Eunes have for the religious life is due to the influence of nearby Annam, where the bonzes are a long way from being venerated and coddled as they are in Laos.

Kha

result. But the Kha ideal is to possess a battery of gongs of different sizes and timbres, and with these they manage to obtain quite perfect chords.

Industry. Withdrawn in their mountains where they live in small isolated groups, the Khas use their leisure time to make many basket-work and hollow-ware products which have a mark of elegance and a great deal of delicacy. Other tribes make paper from wood pulp, weave mats from rattan and bamboo bark, etc. They use all these products in trade.

Finally, certain Khas exploit deposits of iron ore and transform it into farming implements, while others wash gold-bearing sands.

In general, although the Khas are industrious they work only to procure what is strictly indispensable. They cannot resign themselves to staying away from home for any length of time and dread any stay in the low country, which they say is unhealthy for them. Since they have particular aptitudes for woodcutting, however, they have been successfully employed to cut teak wood in the forests on the right bank of the Mekong which are situated in Siamese territory. But it must be admitted that there they are in mountainous country and in the midst of forests, as in their native region.

The Khas of southern Laos. In southern Laos Khas are found who differ very little from those of Upper Laos. We shall not concern ourselves with them, but shall deal briefly with the many more numerous ones who have particular mores and customs.

The Djarais, the Rades, the Bahnars, the Cedangs, the Peunongs, the Rognaos (1), etc. are the principal types of these Kha tribes,

(1) See Appendix XVIII.

which for the most part are still independent.

These people are proud, large and muscular, supple, trained in all forms of bodily exercise, bold, warlike and brave.

These qualities, moreover, have been developed by their peculiar way of [257] [Illustration] [258] [Blank page] [259] life. Accustomed to hunting slaves from which they extracted large profits by selling them on the banks of the Mekong, these Khas have had to resort to continual expeditions in order to obtain their human game.

For many long years, in fact, they could acquire [Illustration here] the gongs, buffalo, metals, textiles, etc. which they needed only by selling captives, generally Annamites, whom they went and

Se-Bang-Fai. But studies are not yet sufficiently advanced for us to be able to give any useful information. 316

We have nevertheless felt that we should mention these deposits, in order to establish the importance of all this part of Laos from the point of view of mineral wealth.

[327] [Illustration at top of page]

CHAPTER VII

I

SCAVENGING

We have seen that the inhabitants of Laos are apathetic and little inclined to work. They nevertheless find, although they go to scarcely any trouble, enough to supply their needs easily. 461 241

Indeed, with the exception of a few annual crops such as tobacco, cotton and indigo which are grown on the ever-renewed alluvia of the watercourses, the production of rice and of maize are the only occupations which require--and even then during a relatively short time--any degree of work or perseverance. We may mention the opium poppy, ramie, hemp and the mulberry tree merely as a reminder, for only a small part of the population devotes its time to these crops, which are still not at all extensive. [249]

Yet, it may be objected, the native has an easy life, dresses adequately, [328] lives in a house which is solid and comfortable from his point of view, has various tools and utensils, weapons, and sometimes even valuable cloth goods, jewels, etc. He spends money for celebrations and for offerings to the bonzes and pagodas. He pays taxes, he supports court costs which are often large with respect to the question at issue, and he is subject to the exactions of his mandarins to a greater or less degree. Finally, the commercial transactions of Laos involve quantities and sums which are quite high in comparison to the sparse population. 511 [438]

How are we to reconcile all these factors, and how is it that the Laotian, who produces so little with his labor, nevertheless has all he needs to get along on?

This is due to the fact that Laos is above all else a scavenging country. 314